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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: HOT TOPICS FROM AFGHANISTAN, LEBANON, AND IRAQ

1. Summary: The Omani Internet message board "al-Sablah" is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, this popular site nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Alleged Desecration In Afghanistan By U.S. Forces
-- The Mehlis Report
-- Saddam Hussein

End summary.

Heated Emotions

2. The subject of U.S. forces immolating two Taliban bodies in Afghanistan set off a round of emotional postings on the Internet message board. Nearly all of the 17 responses (out of 680 hits) sharply criticized the burning of the bodies. One respondent captured the mood of this majority: "These U.S. soldiers are really the dregs of society. It is an established fact that the majority of these troops are either unemployed or criminals, who joined the armed forces merely for the sake of material interests. They are cowards in actual battle zones, as evidenced by their treatment of the Vietcong, the Iraqi resistance fighters, and now the Taliban."

3. However, some respondents attempted to make broader - and even positive - statements about the American people. "When events like this happen, sometimes you might think the Americans are the stupidest people in the world because of their poor awareness of the cultures of other nations. Unfortunately, they do not try to educate themselves in this regard. And successive American administrations have exploited this feature for their own purposes," claimed one writer. Another volunteered, "These soldiers do not represent the American people in any way. From my stay in the U.S., I can confirm that the American people are very friendly, and they have treated me in a good manner. In fact, in some instances, the American people are better at supporting Arab and Islamic causes than are Arab and Muslim countries themselves. Just look at their charitable activities."

A Loud Report

4. Equally passionate postings surfaced in a discussion of the Mehlis Report. With 401 hits and 10 responses, the subject touched off a number of fiery questions from al-Sablah members. "Where was the honest, impartial U.N. investigator after the American occupation forces killed thousands of innocent Iraqis? Why didn't we see a report after U.S. troops set fire to two Afghans?" cried one author. Another remarked, "The Israeli butcher Sharon has slaughtered Palestinians in places like Sabra and Shatila, and assassinated Sheikh Yasin and Abdulaziz al-Rantisi, and yet the U.N. did nothing."

5. Focusing on the slain Rafik al-Hariri, another respondent observed, "Since when did the blood of al-Hariri become a source of sadness and pain to the 'sublime' people of the West, who normally have no problem with the killing of Arabs and Muslims? Let us beware: the West will use al-Hariri's death as yet another justification to punish Arab countries, especially those which stand up to the American, European, and Israeli hegemony."

Saddam, This Is Your Life

6. The October 19 commencement of Saddam Hussein's trial by the Iraqi Special Tribunal prompted one al-Sablah member to ask, "What are some of the most important achievements of the former Iraqi president?" 885 forum participants viewed the topic, and 15 provided responses. Among the more laudatory comments were: "He was the first ruler in the world to stand up to the arrogance of America, facing these tyrants for 13 years without showing any exhaustion"; "He procured the necessary resources for the severe struggle against American forces in Iraq, and provided the weapons for the resistance which are currently inflicting such

heavy losses on the invaders"; and "He drove the U.S. and British governments into a state of frustration."

17. The praise continued: "President Saddam has made the Americans pay a high price by diverting hundreds of billions of dollars from the U.S. treasury since 1991 to the occupation of Iraq. These funds might have been used otherwise by Washington to suppress and subjugate other nations." Another contributor noted, "Hussein set a new record in the number of casualties he has inflicted upon the Americans since 1991, and U.S. soldiers are still bleeding from the attacks of the brave resistance movement." Summarized one author, "We can say that it is an honor for President Saddam that his name and the name of his country are still in the headlines of all the major newspapers of the world."

BALTIMORE